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FUNCTIONS OF SED ORGANS IN THE GERMAN REICHSBAHN

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[Comment: The following information was extracted from an article by Robert Menzel, entitled "The Political Administration and Political Departments of the [East] German Reichsbahn," which appeared in the January 1954 issue of Neuer Weg, an organ of the ZK (Central Committee) of the SED (Socialist Unity Party).]

The article illustrates the controls and operational methods of the political organs in the GDR Ministry of Railroads, the REDs (Reichsbahn Directorates), and the RBAs (Reichsbahn Divisions). The author points out that the complex organization of the German Reichsbahn and its importance to all phases of economic life necessitate a central political management to implement the resolutions of the SED and the government.]

In addition to having political qualifications, functionaries in the political departments of the German Reichsbahn, in order to give effective guidance, must be familiar with railroad problems. For this reason almost all personnel working for the Political Administration and its organs have had technical training and experience in the railroad field.

With regard to the tasks of the Political Administration in the German Reichsbahn, the following is stated in a directive of the ZK:

"The Political Administration is responsible for the management of party work in the German Reichsbahn. The ZK guides and controls the Political Administration in the execution of its tasks. The Political Administration is entitled to the rights of a department of the ZK. The party organizations of the Reichsbahn enterprises and administrations operate on the basis of special guiding principles which are endorsed by the ZK.

"The directors of the Political Administration and the political departments in the German Reichsbahn must previously have been party members for a minimum of 3 years.

"The organs of the Political Administration are required to maintain close contact with the local party managements of the Bezirke, Kreise, and villages.

"Cooperation is to be achieved through constant participation of the directors of the political organs in the work of the local party managements, and through periodic reports on political work in railroad affairs submitted by the directors of the political organs at the meetings of the local party managements."

The organizational structure of the Political Administration and its organs corresponds to the administrative structure of the Reichsbahn. The Political Administration, which is accountable to the ZK, is in the Ministry of Railroads. Political departments, which are directed and controlled by the Political Administration, are in the eight REDs and the 38 RBAs. There is also a political department in the Reichsbahn Construction Enterprise, which is directly subordinate to the Ministry of Railroads. The party organizations in the RAWs (railroad repair yards) are also directed by the Political Administration, since the RAWs are directly subordinate to the Ministry of Railroads. The members of the Political Administration and the political departments are not elected, but are appointed in accordance with an established table of organization.

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The organizational structure described above does not parallel the division of the GDR into Bezirke and Kreise, since the railroad system is organized on the basis of key industrial centers and special geographic features. There is no conformity on an area basis between Bezirke and Kreise on the one hand and REDs and RBAs on the other. For example, in the area of RED Erfurt, which includes six RBAs, there are three Bezirk and 42 Kreis managements of the party. (Within the area of an RBA, there are usually four to seven Kreis managements of the party.) As a result of this situation, there is a great deal of confusion as to the role of the Political Administration in general, the authority of the Political Administration in relation to the political departments and the WPC (plant party organizations), and the extent of the responsibility of the Political Administration and its organs for party work in the Reichsbahn. Some party functionaries have the mistaken idea that the political departments are authorized only to exercise economic supervision, and that political supervision is to be undertaken only by the local party managements. Apart from the fact that this idea is wrong in principle, since political work cannot be separated from economic tasks, the ZK directive on the function of the Political Administration clearly states that the management of party work in the German Reichsbahn is the responsibility of the Political Administration, which operates in accordance with guiding principles endorsed by the ZK.

Thus, the Political Administration has full responsibility for party work in the German Reichsbahn. However, it is obvious that the work can be done successfully only if there is close cooperation with the local party organs, that is, with the Bezirk and Kreis managements. For this reason it is essential that the local party organizations supervise the work of the political departments, that they require the latter to submit reports to them, and that they aid the political organs in carrying out directives and instructions endorsed by the ZK.

In order to guarantee close cooperation with the Bezirk and Kreis managements, it was decided that the political department of RED Erfurt is to report to the Bezirk Erfurt management, and that the political department of RBA Gera is to report to the Bezirk management of the party in Gera.

The other RBAs work with the pertinent Kreis management of the party in the same location or with the nearest Kreis management. Liaison with the other Kreis managements of the party within the area of an RBA is conducted by instructors of the political department of the RBA. However, the political department of an RBA cannot report to seven or eight Kreis managements of the party at the same time, but only to the Kreis management which is in the same location as the RBA.

In order to improve cooperation between the political departments and the Bezirk and Kreis managements of the party, the ZK passed a resolution in September 1953, according to which all first secretaries of Bezirk and Kreis managements are required to ask the political directors of the REDs and RBAs to submit reports at periodic intervals. This procedure enables the Bezirk and Kreis managements to supervise the work of the political departments.

There is close contact between the Political Administration and the corresponding department in the ZK. All economic and political problems of railroad affairs are discussed with this department, and the director of the Political Administration is advised on major problems by the director of this department or by a member of the Secretariat. [The Secretariat of the ZK was abolished in July 1953. This probably should read "by a secretary of the ZK."]


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Representatives for railroad affairs have been appointed in the Bezirk managements of the party. Their activities are guided and supervised by the secretariat of the respective Bezirk managements. The representatives have the following functions:

1. To prepare necessary resolutions for the secretariat of the Bezirk management on the improvement of party work on the Bezirk level.
2. To supervise the implementation of those resolutions and directives of the ZK and the Bezirk management which concern railroad operations.
3. To guide and aid the Kreis managements in expanding their activities in railroad affairs.
4. To coordinate the work of the political departments with the Bezirk and Kreis managements.
5. To aid the key officials of the Reichsbahn in applying the cadre principles of the party, and to see to it that the nomenclature of the Bezirk management is adhered to in the railroad field.
6. To discuss transportation problems existing within a Bezirk with the members of the Bezirk and Kreis councils and with Reichsbahn employees, and to inform the secretariat [of the Bezirk management] of these problems.

The resolutions of the ZK, the government, and the Ministry of Railroads constitute the basis of the work of the Political Administration. The Political Administration is not an administrative organization but an operational party organ, which is organized to provide guidance at the lowest level. The director of the Political Administration participates in the staff and management meetings of the Ministry of Railroads. This guarantees that political tasks are not detached from economic tasks, and that all economic tasks are handled and performed in conformity with the views of the party.

The functionaries of the political departments in the REDs and RBAs must not replace the economic directors; their work must be restricted to party activities, to giving aid and advice on all problems to the economic functionaries, and to keeping a strict check on the execution of the resolutions of the party and the government and the orders and directives of the Minister. On the basis of the resolutions of the ZK, quarterly directives are prepared, which are approved by the ZK. These quarterly directives are the basis for the preparation of monthly work plans in the REDs and RBAs, and contain all the major political and economic projects for a given quarter. The directives are explained at work conferences of all political directors.

Supervision of the implementation of political and economic directives is exercised in the following manner. The directive may specify, for example, that the director of the political department of an RED or a given RBA is to report on the fulfillment of the tasks set forth in the directive. From 10 to 14 days before the assigned completion date, an instructor brigade from the Political Administration is sent to the Bezirk concerned. This brigade inspects the political work in the basic organizations of the party and in the RED or RBA. This guarantees that the Political Administration is not wrongly informed or deceived by false optimism. After the political director concerned has given his oral report, the leader of the instructor brigade gives a report containing recommendations for improvement of the work.

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On the basis of this type of supervised reporting, a directive is prepared which points out the errors and weaknesses of the previous work of the RED or RBA concerned, and which specifies concrete tasks for the improvement of the work. If these errors and weaknesses are typical of the over-all work, the directive is forwarded to all other REDs and RBAs. Thus, functionaries and instructors give on-the-spot guidance to the party organizations.

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